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From: Becca Niburg <rniburg@gmail.com>

Date: Mon, Apr 16, 2018 at 10:49 AM

Subject: Re: questions for FIRN

To: Kimberley Flowers <kimaflowers@kw.com>, Hector Garcia <hgarcia@firnonline.org>

Good morning!

Hector and I (finally) had the opportunity to talk over the questions posed above and I've done my best to capture relevant information for you. I hope that Hector will chime in with anything additional or to correct anything I've miscaptured. Please feel free to ask follow up questions or for clarification for anything we've put together here and we will do our best to keep working on getting you the information you need for the committee.

1. We can all attest to the challenges regarding the national atmosphere regarding immigrants and not knowing from one day to the next about what will happen. Each day there are different tweets and comments made that create fear and uncertainty within the community. Everything is in flux and there have been so many policy changes (especially TPS and DACA) and delays in processing applications that no one knows from one day to the next what their status is. There are so many actions taken that don't comport with known law but that requires lawsuits to make sure that the processing is done as required by law and regulation. And that takes time and resources so that is why ACLU and other such organizations have been very busy. But that leaves people waiting much longer for benefits (for example, a work permit is supposed to be decided in 6 months, but recent notifications have indicated that it can take almost a year to be processed) and that creates uncertainty.

Specific to Howard County, there are not enough low cost services available to help. FIRN is booked until July with very limited opportunity to work in emergency situations. FIRN has seen an uptick in need because of the uncertainty in the federal system and our local services have not kept up. Budget season is upon us and hopefully funding will go up, but their demand has doubled, tripled, maybe more and the funding just isn't going to follow that quickly.

2. Cost is a large barrier. There is also a lack of understanding regarding what it takes to fill out a lease application and to qualify for access to the rental unit. This might include bank accounts, salary, and credit history and lack of understanding of how to get the information. So they end up going to live with someone who already has a unit and then they're over occupancy limits. There is no acceptance from real estate agents to open up to the undocumented population for private rentals. The agents think there's too much of a risk, there might be a language barrier, the owner might be against it because of misperception. The perception of some real estate agents is that only rent to own is worth things - so if they don't have a bank account or 5 years work history, they aren't interested because then they can't get a commission on the sale. People are holding money back and not opening accounts because they feel like they have to be able to take it with them quickly if they are removed. So they don't meet minimum qualifications. They are being forced into trailers too as a result.

3. Undocumented immigrants face the same barriers that anyone in poverty has with the addition of status and the fear of persecution. Working minimum (or less than) jobs, no transportation, high cost of living keep people from being able to save, buy a home, invest, etc. Its difficult to establish credit or to establish a stable economic history to show that someone should rent/sell/work with them. There is some stigma as well for those who speak with an accent or who are not citizens. Even if employers are

not specifically identifying those things as reasons for denial, there's that implicit bias that makes it more difficult to find a job. Also, many people did not get a sufficient education in their home country before arriving to take jobs other than the "unskilled" positions that do not require a degree. And in these "unskilled" positions, there is no promotion potential and they are often treated differently. So the manager for a landscaping crew is out doing the same work but not getting paid anything more for the increased responsibility.

4. a. The County currently does not ask for immigration status for permits, licenses, etc. which is a positive and helps. It also helps that there is no cooperation with ICE officially, and there seems to be no reason for this to change as the gang activity with MS-13 is low. Immigrants and non-immigrants are generally treated the same through public services like food bank, DSS, etc. There are two school policies - non-discrimination and new immigration policy (not passed yet) - to allow for equal treatment in schools. ICE is not allowed on school grounds so that provides security. FIRM is the only program currently in place only for immigrants. HopeWorks and Grassroots do support the immigrant population along with others who qualify. There are some religious groups that provides some services (English learning, citizenship classes for example). Health department provides interpreters, several medical practices serve immigrants that have no access to health care by minimum fees or some plan for care. There's no official across the board coordination though FIRM does unofficially do a lot of that.

b. There is a faction of people that threaten undocumented immigrants which keeps them from accessing services that they would normally be entitled to. For example, there are landlords that tell immigrants not to ask for the security deposit back under threat of calling ICE to pick the tenant or their family up. The County has some policies in place that should help but they aren't specific to immigrants and their unique issues, so spelling them out would make immigrants more apt to come forward or avail themselves of protections. FIRM is also a middle man for issues but that takes resources away from other available services. Having somewhere that immigrants could go directly instead of having to go to multiple places to get connected to services would be helpful.

c. Some sort of community court/mediation system would be helpful so that undocumented people did not have to go to court. Consumer affairs would be the natural place for such a program to be and is already working on some of these issues. The Human Rights Commission may also be a natural fit to assist but they have declined to get involved previously.

Thank you for your service to our community and for reaching out!

Becca

On Tue, Mar 27, 2018 at 10:42 PM, Kimberley Flowers <kimaflowers@kw.com> wrote:

Becca,

Thanks again for your willingness to serve on our sub-committee. Your expertise and experience in this area is very much appreciated. Here are basic questions for FIRM. Feel free to augment the list of questions will those you feel should also be posed.

1. What are the most pressing issues for the immigrant community in the County?
2. Does the immigrant community typically face housing challenges in the County? If yes, what is the nature of those challenges?

3. What are the barriers to achieving economic prosperity for the immigrant population in the County?

4. What existing County policies/programs effectively support the immigrant population? Which policies/programs work against the immigrant community? Where are there gaps in services? This should be a good start. Are you available to share the outcome of your discussion w/FIRN via conference call at one of our upcoming meetings? If yes, let me know what date works for you? Also, are there any other groups/individuals we should reach out to for more perspective on the immigrant community?

Thanks,
Kim

P.S. The finest compliment I can ever receive is the referral of your friends, family, and business associates.

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